

Subsequently, on 19 March 1960 while photographing vultures at an animal carcass on Kuar Bet off Pachham, Mr. Charles Ho obtained an excellent picture of a solitary Cinereous Vulture amongst a gathering of Whitebacked and Longbilled (possibly also some Fulvous) Vultures and a pair of ravens (*Corvus corax*). Mr. Ho remarked on the enormous size and dark coloration of this bird, and on the deference shown to it by the other feasters. The raven in the bottom picture, according to Mr. Ho, was definitely not the brown-necked species, therefore doubtless *C. c. laurencei* which has been collected in Kutch before.

33, PALI HILL,
BANDRA,
BOMBAY 50,
April 25, 1960.

SÁLIM ALI

[This large vulture is found in south Europe, northern Africa, and eastwards through south-west and south-central Asia to India and China. It breeds in Baluchistan and possibly along the Himalayas to Cachar in Assam. In winter it descends into the Punjab, Sind, and other parts of northern India, the southernmost record being from Mitli in Kaira District, about 40 miles south of Ahmedabad (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 50: 945-6).—EDS.]

7. ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE REDHEADED MERLIN (*FALCO CHIQUERA*) IN KERALA

Though in popular bird books there are vague general remarks implying that the Redheaded Merlin (*Falco chiquera*) might be met with all over south India, Whistler (1936) questions the occurrence of the species in the then Presidency of Madras. He states: 'Dewar includes the Redheaded Merlin in his Madras list, but as he makes no comment on the fact and there is no other record for the Presidency, I think it wiser not to admit the species to the Presidency list until further evidence is forthcoming.'

Koelz (1947) records a male taken at Cudappah on March 20. This appears to be the only definite record for the south.

The facts given below show that the bird not only occurs in Kerala State, but might even be found breeding here.

I saw the Redheaded Merlin first at Kavasseri (Palghat Dist.). On 4 June 1950, late in the evening two Merlins came flying from the jungle across a river, and alighted on a palmyra tree. Their

incessant bickering and the fact that finally one was chased away by the other suggested that they were not a mated pair. I made no attempt to judge their sexes, but noted that (i) only one of them had a prominent moustachial streak, (ii) it had also a more reddish head than the other, and (iii) only one of the birds uttered call-notes: a continual *tiriririri-tiriririri*. In the light of later experience, I guess that the one which uttered the call-notes was a fully-fledged young bird which the other, presumably a parent, was trying to shake off.

A single, silent Redheaded Merlin was found at the same spot on 18 May 1951, again in the evening.

On 30 April 1958, I took up residence at Chittur-Cochin, 15 miles ENE. of Kavasseri. On 22 May 1958, I found three Redheaded Merlins on a palmyra tree beside the river in terrain almost identical with that where the birds were seen at Kavasseri. Time 18.30 hrs.

At 11.00 hrs. on the next day they were not found at the place, but at 13.30 hrs. all three were there. Judging by the absence of barring on the breast and the middle of the underparts as well as by their constant calling and wing-quivering when perched, I decided that two were young ones. The other bird of the party had breast and the rest of the underparts closely barred in grey, and was constantly chivvying kites and Serpent Eagles which passed that way. It was undoubtedly a parent bird.

That evening I watched them again from 17.00 hrs. for half an hour. One of the juveniles had disappeared. The two that were there repeatedly swooped at Common Mynas feeding on the meadow between the trees and the river, but the mynas just scattered and none was caught.

Once the two falcons pursued a Whitebreasted Kingfisher. The kingfisher fell flop into the shallow stream in the river. Every time it attempted to escape, the falcons swooped forcing the kingfisher back into the water. After half-a-dozen tries at the victim, the falcons moved off and the kingfisher escaped.

On the 24th at 18.15 hrs. there were only two falcons at the place. None was found at 18.30 hrs. on the 25th. On the 28th at 17.00 hrs. there were two. On the 30th only one at 17.30 hrs. On the 4th of June at 18.30 hrs. one was present.

Having decided to obtain a skin for confirmation of my identification, I went to their haunts on 8 June with a friend who had agreed to shoot one of the birds for me. At 18.00 hrs. a single falcon came flying with a small bird in its talons and, alighting on a palmyra frond, began feeding. My friend shot the bird just as it had finished eating. The skin was sent to the Bombay Natural History Society,

and Dr. Sálím Ali confirmed my identification. Sri Humayun Abdulali wrote: 'From the size and colour the specimen appears to be a female in immature plumage'.

The Redheaded Merlin was seen again in the same area later on. Details are given below:

11th June 1958—One seen flying over at 11·00 hrs.

13th „ „ — „ „ „ „ „ 18·40 hrs.

12th April 1959—Two harrying a Brahminy Kite at 18·30 hrs.

13th „ „ —One „ „ „ „ 18·15 hrs.

14th „ „ —One eating a small bird on palmyra tree, 18·00 hrs.

My thanks are due to Sri M. Srinathan Nair, Cochin Nair Bank, Chittur, for having shot one of the falcons for me, and to Sri M. K. Prasad, then Lecturer in Botany, Govt. College, Chittur, for having prepared the skin.

GOVERNMENT COLLEGE,
CHITTUR-COCHIN,
April 15, 1960.

K. K. NEELAKANTAN

REFERENCES

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| <p>Koelz, W. (1947): Notes on a collection of birds from Madras Presidency. <i>J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.</i> 47:141.</p> | <p>Whistler, H. (1936): The Vernay Scientific Survey of the Eastern Ghats. <i>J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.</i> 38:419.</p> |
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[The Virus Research Centre at Poona have in their collection a male and a female *Falco chiquera* obtained by B. S. Lamba at Palivada in Krishna District, Andhra State on 17th November 1956.—EDS.]

8. THE BUFFBREASTED SANDPIPER, *TRYNGITES SUBRUFICOLLIS* (VIEILLOT): AN ADDITION TO THE AVIFAUNA OF INDIA AND CEYLON

A specimen collected by Dr. T. S. U. De Zylva on 5 March 1960 at Kalametiya Lagoon was forwarded to me for identification. My identification has been confirmed by the Senior Scientific Officer in the Bird Room at the British Museum (Natural History), London. Sex, unfortunately, unknown.

Kalametiya Lagoon, situated on the southern coast of Ceylon, is bordered by a grass plain on the eastern side which is cropped low by cattle and buffalo. Dr. De Zylva states the bird was seen by itself on this grass plain reminding him of a Golden Plover; on making a closer inspection through binoculars he realised it to be something



Neelakantan, K K . 1960. "On the Occurrence of the Redheaded Merlin (*Falco Chiquera*) in Kerala." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 57, 409–411.

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